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AUTHOR Dondiego, Barbara L.
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ABSTRACT

In craft training, children are taught preschool skills as they create art projects with an adult. By creating toys, pictures, and other projects from readily available materials, children become involved in cooking, coloring, cutting, drawing, gluing, and beginning writing. The first rule of craft training is to let the child do the work of making the craft. The second rule is that teachers talk to the child in specific terms and encourage the child to talk back. The third rule is that repeated exposure is essential for learning. Since most preschools operate on a narrow budget, one appealing feature of craft training is its use of everyday objects as teaching tools. For example, napkins can be used to teach children about shapes. Crafts offer the child an opportunity to develop his or her prewriting skills at the child's individual rate of development and interest. Whatever skill the child is learning while making crafts can be emphasized by specific praise. (AC)

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CRAFT-TRAINING in the Preschool Curriculum

Barbara L. Dondiego

CRAFT-TRAINING is the technique of combining inexpensive materials with precise methodology to teach preschool skills to children as they create art projects with an adult. It incorporates the appropriate use of crafts into the preschool curriculum.

David Elkind, former president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, stated, "Young children learn best through active manipulation and exploration of materials with opportunities to initiate their own learning projects." With the use of daily craft projects presented by the CRAFT-TRAINING technique, children enjoy the opportunity to explore, experiment, create, and learn. Because of their hands-on nature, crafts present an ideal medium for teaching preschoolers, allowing children to learn at an individual rate.

By creating toys, pictures, and other projects from readily available materials children become involved in cooking, coloring, cutting, drawing, gluing, and beginning writing. They gradually develop construction skills, small motor skills, and better coordination as they work. They learn to recognize colors, shapes, and size relationships as they work on the crafts with the guidance of an adult.

While the children discuss their creations with classmates and teachers they develop language and communication skills and learn new descriptive terms. When they assemble a craft with an

adult's help, they learn to listen, follow directions, and think and act in sequence. They learn the joy of making something that is useful, decorative, or fun to play with.

THE FIRST RULE OF CRAFT-TRAINING

To bring CRAFT-TRAINING into the classroom the preschool teacher must <u>let the child do the work of making the craft</u>. This is the main point to remember so that the children can benefit from craft time. The only appropriate use of crafts in the preschool classroom occurs when the child is helped to do his or her own creating.

When a teacher is faced with twenty three-year-olds, and she wants them to make something to take home that day, it is a great temptation to do too much for them. A teacher's most common mistake is to assume that children cannot cut, glue, and construct. Of course it takes time for each child to be shown how to hold scissors in one hand with the thumb pointing up to make those scissors cut. It takes time to spread newspapers on the child's work area so he can glue, or to guide her hand through the first lines that form her name, but it is time well spent. CRAFT-TRAINING emphasizes that crafts are a valuable tool for learning, and not just "busy work" whose purpose is to produce an item to impress paying parents.

The second rule of CRAFT-TRAINING urges the teacher to talk to the child in specific terms and encourage the child to talk back to the teacher. Before droves of mothers joined the work force children spent a great deal of time talking with them. This was of the utmost importance to their early education. Dr. Jerry Robbins, former dean of the education department at Georgia State University insists that a child's success in school "has to do with the amount of time the parents spend with their children, the kind of environment in the home, books and magazines, the toys the child has to play with as a preschooler, the kinds of opportunities parents have provided in terms of taking them places and showing them things and talking to them."

In 1987, 62.3% of women with children under age three to age thirteen years worked outside the home. That number rose to 68% in 1990. Most of the preschool children of these families are in day care centers. It is important for day care personnel to encourage children to participate in the give and take of everyday conversation that used to take place on a one-to-one basis at mother's knee. Creating crafts together is an opportune time to share dialogue, both child-teacher and child-child.

By using the CRAFT-TRAINING technique of speaking in specific terms the teacher can help the child learn colors, shapes, sizes,

and spatial relationships during their conversations. For instance when the child selects a sheet of construction paper for a project the teacher can say, "You chose a blue rectangle. Let's see what you can make with your blue rectangle." In this way the child has been exposed to the color blue and to the concept of the rectangle when it has meaning to the child.

This brings us to the third rule of CRAFT-TRAINING, that repeated exposure is essential for learning. The child may not remember the rectangle shape the first time she is introduced to it., but as the teacher converses with her in specific terms on a daily basis, she will be repeatedly exposed to the concept and will have the opportunity of learning it. For instance she will come in contact with another rectangle when the teacher hands out napkins at snack time and says, "Look! Here is a white rectangle. Who wants a white rectangle?"

Children learn in small, repeated increments instead of large doses. By creating with craft materials with an adult's guidance they can be reintroduced to the same knowledge or skill in a variety of ways. For example the child practices small motor activity when he creates pretend cookies from flour-salt dough, again when he strings cereal to make a necklace, and a third time when he colors a paper wind sock to play with outside. CRAFT-TRAINING helps the teacher become aware of the importance of

repeated exposure to individual concepts and skills during craft time.

USING EVERYDAY OBJECTS AS TEACHING TOOLS

Most preschools are privately owned and operate on a narrow budget; there is not much money for expensive craft materials. CRAFT-TRAINING helps the preschool staff realize that almost anything can be turned into a craft that can be used to teach the children. It also helps teachers see the educational value of everyday items such as a paper napkin or a sandwich served for lunch. The sandwich can be used to teach shapes when the teacher speaks <u>in specific terms</u> and says, "Today we are going to eat <u>triangles!</u>" The sandwiches may be cut into rectangles or four small squares, depending on the shape to be taught. They can be served on a <u>circle</u> paper plate. It is just a matter of semantics.

By playing "The Napkin Game" several times a week, children can learn about basic shapes, not only what they look like, but also how they feel and how they are created. The Napkin Game is played thus: The teacher holds up a rectangular napkin and asks the children, "What shape is this?" If no one knows, she tells them the answer and repeats the question. "This is a rectangle. What is it?" The children will answer, "A rectangle."

Now the teacher will open the napkin into a large square.

"Look!" she will say. "Now what shape is it?" If no one knows, she tells them and then repeats the question. "It's a square. What shape is it?" The children will answer, "A square."

Next the teacher will fold the napkin corner-to-corner, forming a large triangle. Teacher: "Look! What shape is this napkin?" If no one knows, she tells them and repeats the question. "This is a triangle. What shape is it? That's right. It's a triangle."

Then the teacher will say, "We're going to play The Napkin Game. If you can tell me the shape, you win the napkin." The teacher folds the napkin into a triangle for the first child. "Sam," she says, "what shape is this?"

Sam: "A triangle."

The teacher hands him the triangle napkin. "That's right! You win a triangle!" She folds a napkin into a rectangle and asks another child, "Donna, what shape is this?" Donna does not know. The teacher tells her the answer and then repeats the question: "It's a rectangle. What shape is it? That's right. It's a rectangle. Donna wins a rectangle!" She hands Donna the rectangle napkin and goes on to the next child with a square napkin.

This game should be played quickly and with a lot of enthusiasm to keep the children's interest. When the children

receive their napkin shapes, the teacher may notice them folding and unfolding the napkins into new shapes, imitating what they have just seen. Parents have reported to me that their children fold napkins at home and play The Napkin Game with mom and dad.

CRAFT-TRAINING MAKES COLORING AND WRITING MEANINGFUL AND CREATIVE

Coloring is a very good teaching tool if used appropriately. Water-base markers and crayons require small motor skills that increase a child's eye-hand coordination; the bright hues can help her learn about colors. In many classrooms, however, coloring and drawing are used to occupy time and to keep children in their chairs. Coloring becomes a boring pastime assigned by the teacher.

CRAFT-TRAINING makes coloring meaningful because the child has a purpose of his own when decorating his craft. Coloring a paper wind sock makes it beautiful. Coloring a paper mask makes it exciting to wear. Coloring cardboard cookies to glue on a homemade cookie jar makes them look delicious. Crafts give a child a reason to use markers and crayons.

Crafts also offer an opportunity for prewriting skills to proceed at the child's individual rate of development and interest. When he finishes a project he can be helped to write his name on it to distinguish it from someone else's project. He will soon learn to recognize his name as well as those of his classmates

if he is encouraged to print his name on nearly everything he makes.

Prewriting can also be intrinsic to a craft. If the child puts together a shapes picture of a bus, for instance, he should be given the opportunity to write the word bus on his picture. If he goes on a field trip to a nature center and then creates a paper bird to take home, he should be introduced to the spelling of bird. He may not learn the shapes of the letters that day, but he has met the word in a brief and meaningful lesson. The next time he comes in contact with the words bus and bird he will have another chance to learn about them. Learning occurs in small increments as the child develops readiness for it. By exposing him to ideas beyond his grasp the preschool teacher enables him to begin learning new concepts.

CRAFT-TRAINING MEANS USP: USING SPECIFIC PRAISE

CRAFT-TRAINING emphasizes the skill the child is learning while making crafts by using specific praise. When a child is painting at the easel with red paint the teacher may comment, "Henry, I like your red painting." If a child is cutting a purple triangle the teacher can say, "Linda, that's a good purple triangle you're cutting. You're a good cutter." If the child is attempting to write her name on a project the teacher may praise

her by saying, "Jennifer, that's good writing your name." The USP technique takes some getting used to and may seem exaggerated to adults, but it is simple praise couched in specific terms. The child knows precisely why he or she is being complimented. When children are praised in specific terms they are more inclined to repeat the desired behavior.

CONCLUSIONS

CRAFT-TRAINING emphasizes teaching preschool skills with low-cost crafts. It involves the following steps: (1) Let the child do the work, (2) Talk to the child in specific terms and encourage the child to talk back, (3) Use repeated exposure for learning, (4) Use everyday objects as teaching tools, (5) Make coloring and writing meaningful and creative, (6) Use specific praise: USP.

Craft time is not busy work. If used correctly it is a valid part of the preschool curriculum. By using the six steps of the CRAFT-TRAINING technique preschool teachers can help children gain skills and confidence for future school success. The best thing about CRAFT-TRAINING, however, is that it is a fun way for young children to learn.

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